

TIDES

BY

JOHN DRINKWATER

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Drinking water

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TIDES

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TIDES

A BOOK OF POEMS BY
JOHN DRINKWATER

DEDICATION

TO GENERAL SIR IAN HAMILTON

Because the darling chivalries,
That light your battle-line, belong
To music's heart no less than these,
I bring you my campaigns of song.

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A MAN'S DAUGHTER

THERE is an old woman who looks each night
Out of the wood.
She has one tooth, that isn't too white.
She isn't too good.

She came from the north looking for me,
About my jewel.
Her son, she says, is tall as can be ;
But, men say, cruel.

My girl went northward, holiday making,
And a queer man spoke
At the woodside once when night was breaking,
And her heart broke.

For ever since she has pined and pined,
A sorry maid ;
Her fingers are slack as the wool they wind,
Or her girdle-braid.

So now shall I send her north to wed,
Who here may know
Only the little house of the dead
To ease her woe ?

Or keep her for fear of that old woman,
As a bird quick-eyed,
And her tall son who is hardly human,
At the woodside ?

She is my babe and my daughter dear,
How well, how well.
Her grief to me is a fourfold fear,
Tongue cannot tell.

And yet I know that far in that wood
Are crumbling bones,
And a mumble mumble of nothing that's good,
In heathen tones.

And I know that frail ghosts flutter and sigh
In brambles there,
And never a bird or beast to cry—
Beware, beware,—

While threading the silent thickets go
Mother and son,
Where scrupulous berries never grow,
And airs are none.

And her deep eyes peer at eventide
Out of the wood,
And her tall son waits by the dark woodside,
For maidenhood.

And the little eyes peer, and peer, and peer ;
And a word is said.
And some house knows, for many a year,
But years of dread.

VENUS IN ARDEN

NOW LOVE, her mantle thrown,
Goes naked by,
Threading the woods alone,
Her royal eye
Happy because the primroses again
Break on the winter continence of men.

I saw her pass to-day
In Warwickshire,
With the old imperial way,
The old desire,
Fresh as among those other flowers they went,
More beautiful for Adon's discontent.

Those other years she made
Her festival
When the blue eggs were laid
And lambs were tall,
By the Athenian rivers while the reeds
Made love melodious for the Ganymedes.

And now through Cantlow brakes,
By Wilmcote hill,
To Avon-side, she makes
Her garlands still,
And I who watch her flashing limbs am one
With youth whose days three thousand years are done.

COTSWOLD LOVE

BLUE SKIES are over Cotswold
And April snows go by,
The lasses turn their ribbons
For April's in the sky,
And April is the season
When Sabbath girls are dressed,
From Rodboro' to Campden,
In all their silken best.

An ankle is a marvel
When first the buds are brown,
And not a lass but knows it
From Stow to Gloucester town.
And not a girl goes walking
Along the Cotswold lanes
But knows men's eyes in April
Are quicker than their brains.

It's little that it matters,
So long as you're alive,
If you're eighteen in April,
Or rising sixty-five,
When April comes to Amberley
With skies of April blue,
And Cotswold girls are bridging
With slyly tilted shoe.

THE MIDLANDS

BLACK in the summer night my Cotswold hill
Aslant my window sleeps, beneath a sky
Deep as the bedded violets that fill
March woods with dusky passion. As I lie
Abed between cool walls I watch the host
Of the slow stars lit over Gloucester plain,
And drowsily the habit of these most
Beloved of English lands moves in my brain,
While silence holds dominion of the dark,
Save when the foxes from the spinneys bark.

I see the valleys in their morning mist
Wreathed under limpid hills in moving light,
Happy with many a yeoman melodist :
I see the little roads of twinkling white
Busy with fieldward teams and market gear
Of rosy men, cloth-gaitered, who can tell
The many-minded changes of the year,
Who know why crops and kine fare ill or well ;
I see the sun persuade the mist away,
Till town and stead are shining to the day.

I see the wagons move along the rows
Of ripe and summer-breathing clover-flower,
I see the lissom husbandman who knows
Deep in his heart the beauty of his power,
As, lithely pitched, the full-heaped fork bids on
The harvest home. I hear the rickyard fill

With gossip as in generations gone,
While wagon follows wagon from the hill.
I think how, when our seasons all are sealed,
Shall come the unchanging harvest from the field.

I see the barns and comely manors planned
By men who somehow moved in comely thought,
Who, with a simple shipp on to their hand,
As men upon some godlike business wrought ;
I see the little cottages that keep
Their beauty still where since Plantaganet
Have come the shepherds happily to sleep,
Finding the loaves and cups of cider set ;
I see the twisted shepherds, brown and old,
Driving at dusk their glimmering sheep to fold.

And now the valleys that upon the sun
Broke from their opal veils, are veiled again,
And the last light upon the wolds is done,
And silence falls on flocks and fields and men ;
And black upon the night I watch my hill,
And the stars shine, and there an owly wing
Brushes the night, and all again is still,
And, from this land of worship that I sing,
I turn to sleep, content that from my sires
I draw the blood of England's midmost shires.

MAY GARDEN

A SHOWER of green gems on my apple tree
This first morning of May
Has fallen out of the night, to be
Herald of holiday—

Bright gems of green that, fallen there,
Seem fixed and glowing on the air.

Until a flutter of blackbird wings
Shakes and makes the boughs alive,
And the gems are now no frozen things,
But apple-green buds to thrive
On sap of my May garden, how well
The green September globes will tell.

Also my pear tree has its buds,
But they are silver yellow,
Like autumn meadows when the floods
Are silver under willow,
And here shall long and shapely pears
Be gathered while the autumn wears.

And there are sixty daffodils
Beneath my wall. . . .
And jealousy it is that kills
This world when all
The spring's behaviour here is spent
To make the world magnificent.

PLOUGH

THE SNOWS are come in early state,
And love shall now go desolate
If we should keep too close a gate.

Over the woods a splendour falls
Of death, and grey are the Gloucester walls,
And grey the skies for burials.

But secret in the falling snow
I see the patient ploughman go,
And watch the quiet furrows grow.

POLITICS

YOU SAY a thousand things,
Persuasively,
And with strange passion hotly I agree,
And praise your zest,
And then
A blackbird sings
On April lilac, or fieldfaring men,
Ghostlike, with loaded wain,
Come down the twilit lane
To rest,
And what is all your argument to me?

Oh yes—I know, I know,
It must be so—
You must devise
Your myriad policies,
For we are little wise,
And must be led and marshalled, lest we keep
Too fast a sleep
Far from the central world's realities.
Yes, we must heed—
For surely you reveal
Life's very heart; surely with flaming zeal
You search our folly and our secret need;
And surely it is wrong
To count my blackbird's song,
My cones of lilac, and my wagon team,
More than a world of dream.

But still
A voice calls from the hill—
I must away—
I cannot hear your argument to-day.

BIRMINGHAM—1916

ONCE Athens worked and went to see the play,
And Thomas Atkins kissed the girls of Rome,
In council in Victoria Square to-day
Are grey-beard Nazarenes, with shop and home
And counting-house and all the friendly cares
That Joseph knew ; in Bull Ring markets meet
Gossips as once at Babylonian fairs,
And Helen walks in Corporation Street.

Now Troy is Homer ; and of Nazareth
Grave histories are of one love that was strong ;
Athens is beauty ; Rome an immortal death ;
And Babylon immortal in a song
Perplexed as ours these cities were of old ;
And shall our name greatly as these be told ?

INSCRIPTION FOR A WAR MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN

THEY nothing feared whose names I celebrate.
Greater than death they died ; and their estate
Is here on Cotswold comradely to live
Upon your lips in every draught I give.

TREASON

WHAT TIME I WRITE my roundelays,
I am as proud as princes gone,
Who built their empires in old days,
As Tamburlaine or Solomon ;
And wisely though companions then
Say well it is and well I sing,
Assured above the praise of men
I am a solitary king.

But when I leave that straiter mood,
That lonely hour, and put aside
The continence of solitude,
I fall in treason to my pride,
And if a witling's word be spent
Upon my song in jealousy,
In anger and in argument
I am as derelict as he.

MY ESTATE

I HAVE FOUR LOVES, four loves are mine,
My wife who makes all beauty be,
Tom Squire and Master Candleshine,
And then my grey dog Timothy.

My wife makes bramble-berry pies,
And she is bright as bramble dew,
She knows the way the weather flies,
And tells me every thing to do.

Tom Squire he is my neighbour man,
His apples fall upon my grass,
And in the morning, when we can,
We say good-morning as we pass.

And Master Candleshine the True,
Considering some fault of mine,
Says—"Had it been for me to do,
It had been hard for Candleshine."

When I have thought all things that be,
And drop the latch and climb the stair,
And want an eye for company,
My grey dog Timothy is there.

My loves are one and two and three
And four they are, good loves of mine,
Tom Squire, my grey dog Timothy,
My wife and Master Candleshine.

WITH DAFFODILS

I SEND YOU DAFFODILS, my dear,
For these are emperors of spring,
And in my heart you keep so clear
So delicate an empery,
That none but emperors could be
Ambassadors endowed to bring
My messages of honesty.

My mind makes faring to and fro,
Deft or bewildered, dark or kind,
That not the eye of God may know
Which motion is of true estate
And which a twisted runagate
Of all the farings of my mind,
And which has honesty for mate.

Only my hope for you is clean
Of scandal's use, and though, may be,
Far rangers have my passions been,—
Since thus the word of Eden went,—
Yet of the springs of my content,
My very wells of honesty,
Are you the only firmament.

FOR A GUEST ROOM

ALL WORDS are said,
And may it fall
That, crowning these,
You here shall find
A friendly bed,
A sheltering wall,
Your body's ease,
A quiet mind.

May you forget
In happy sleep
The world that still
You hold as friend,
And may it yet
Be ours to keep
Your friendly will
To the world's end.

For he is blest
Who, fixed to shun
All evil, when
The worst is known,
Counts, east and west,
When life is done,
His debts to men
In love alone.

ON READING THE MS. OF DOROTHY
WORDSWORTH'S JOURNALS

TO-DAY I READ the poet's sister's book,
She who so comforted those Grasmere days
When song was at the flood, and thence I took
A larger note of fortitude and praise.

And in her ancient fastness beauty stirred,
And happy faith was in my heart again,
Because the virtue of a simple word
Was durable above the lives of men.

For reading there that quiet record made
Of skies and hills, domestic hours, and free
Traffic of friends, and song, and duty paid,
I touched the wings of immortality.

THE OLD WARRIOR

SORROW HAS COME to me,
Making the world to be
Of sunken cheek ;
Faded my fields, and of
Names that were most to love,
I dare not speak.

Would that my soul were blind,
Since duty brings to mind
All that is done,
Saying, 'How gladly you
Walked with your chosen few
Under my sun.'

I am an alien now ;
Tell me, good stranger, how
Best may be borne
His grief who comes at night
To his own window-light
Friendless, forlorn.

No. I will pass. Again
Of my delight in men
Nothing shall tell.
Now is my travel where
My lost companions fare ;
Onward. Farewell.

THE GUEST

SOMETIMES I FEEL that death is very near,
And, with half-lifted hand,
Looks in my eyes, and tells me not to fear,
But walk his friendly land,
Comrade with him, and wise
As peace is wise.

Then, greatly though my heart with pity moves
For dear imperilled loves,
I somehow know
That death is friendly so,
A comfortable spirit ; one who takes
Long thought for all our sakes.

I wonder ; will he come that friendly way,
That guest, or roughly in the appointed day ?
And will, when the last drops of life are spilt,
My soul be torn from me,
Or, like a ship truly and trimly built,
Slip quietly to sea ?

REVERIE

HERE in the unfrequented noon,
In the green hermitage of June,
While overhead a rustling wing
Minds me of birds that do not sing
Until the cooler eve rewakes
The service of melodious brakes,
And thoughts are lonely rangers, here,
In shelter of the primrose year,
I curiously meditate
Our brief and variable state.

I think how many are alive
Who better in the grave would thrive,
If some so long a sleep might give
Better instruction how to live ;
I think what splendours had been said
By darlings now untimely dead
Had death been wise in choice of these,
And made exchange of obsequies.

I think what loss to government
It is that good men are content,
Well knowing that an evil will
Is folly-stricken too, and still
Itself considers only wise
For all rebukes and surgeries,
That evil men should raise their pride
To place and fortune undefied.

I think how daily we beguile
Our brains, that yet a little while
And all our congregated schemes
And our perplexity of dreams,
Shall come to whole and perfect state.
I think, however long the date
Of life may be, at last the sun
Shall pass upon campaigns undone.

I look upon the world and see
A world colonial to me,
Whereof I am the architect,
And principal and intellect,
A world whose shape and savour spring
Out of my lone imagining,
A world whose nature is subdued
For ever to my instant mood,
And only beautiful can be
Because of beauty is in me.
And then I know that every mind
Among the millions of my kind
Makes earth his own particular
And privately created star,
That earth has thus no single state,
Being every man articulate.
Till thought has no horizon then
I try to think how many men
There are to make an earth apart
In symbol of the urgent heart,
For there are forty in my street,

And seven hundred more in Greet,
And families at Luton Hoo,
And there are men in China, too.

And what immensity is this
That is but a parenthesis
Set in a little human thought,
Before the body comes to naught.
There at the bottom of the copse
I see a field of turnip tops,
I see the cropping cattle pass
There in another field, of grass,
And fields and fields, with seven towns,
A river, and a flight of downs,
Steeple for all religious men,
Ten thousand trees, and orchards ten,
A mighty span that curves away
Into blue beauty, and I lay
All this as quartered on a sphere
Hung huge in space, a thing of fear
Vast as the circle of the sky
Completed to the astonished eye ;
And then I think that all I see,
Whereof I frame immensity
Globed for amazement, is no more
Than a shire's corner, and that four
Great shires being ten times multiplied
Are small on the Atlantic tide
As an emerald on a silver bowl . . .
And the Atlantic to the whole

Sweep of this tributary star
That is our earth is but . . . and far
Through dreadful space the outmeasured mind
Seeks to conceive the unconfined.

I think of Time. How, when his wing
Composes all our quarrelling
In some green corner where May leaves
Are loud with blackbirds on all eves,
And all the dust that was our bones
Is underneath memorial stones,
Then shall old jealousies, while we
Lie side by side most quietly,
Be but oblivion's fools, and still
When curious pilgrims ask—'What skill
Had these that from oblivion saves?'—
My song shall sing above our graves.

I think how men of gentle mind,
And friendly will, and honest kind,
Deny their nature and appear
Fellows of jealousy and fear ;
Having single faith, and natural wit
To measure truth and cherish it,
Yet, strangely, when they build in thought,
Twisting the honesty that wrought
In the straight motion of the heart,
Into its feigning counterpart
That is the brain's betrayal of
The simple purposes of love ;

And what yet sorrier decline
Is theirs when, eager to confine
No more within the silent brain
Its habit, thought seeks birth again
In speech, as honesty has done
In thought ; then even what had won
From heart to brain fades and is lost
In this pretended pentecost,
This their forlorn captivity
To speech, who have not learnt to be
Lords of the word, nor kept among
The sterner climates of the tongue . . .
So truth is in their hearts, and then
Falls to confusion in the brain,
And, fading through this mid-eclipse,
It perishes upon the lips.

I think how year by year I still
Find working in my dauntless will
Sudden timidities that are
Merely the echo of some far
Forgotten tyrannies that came
To youth's bewilderment and shame ;
That yet a magisterial gown,
Being worn by one of no renown
And half a generation less
In years than I, can dispossess
Something my circumspecter mood
Of excellence and quietude,
And if a Bishop speaks to me

I tremble with propriety.

I think how strange it is that he
Who goes most comradely with me
In beauty's worship, takes delight
In shows that to my eager sight
Are shadows and unmanifest,
While beauty's favour and behest
To me in motion are revealed
That is against his vision sealed ;
Yet is our hearts' necessity
Not twofold, but a common plea
That chaos come to continence,
Whereto the arch-intelligence
Richly in divers voices makes
Its answer for our several sakes.

I see the disinherited
And long procession of the dead,
Who have in generations gone
Held fugitive dominion
Of this same primrose pasturage
That is my momentary wage.
I see two lovers move along
These shadowed silences of song,
With spring in blossom at their feet
More incommunicably sweet
To their hearts' more magnificence,
Than to the common courts of sense,
Till joy his tardy closure tells

With coming of the curfew bells.
I see the knights of spur and sword
Crossing the little woodland ford,
Riding in ghostly cavalcade
On some unchronicled crusade.
I see the silent hunter go
In cloth of yeoman green, with bow
Strung, and a quiver of grey wings.
I see the little herd who brings
His cattle homeward, while his sire
Makes bivouac in Warwickshire
This night, the liege and loyal man
Of Cavalier or Puritan.
And as they pass, the nameless dead,
Unsung, uncelebrate, and sped
Upon an unremembered hour
As any twelvemonth fallen flower,
I think how strangely yet they live
For all their days were fugitive.

I think how soon we too shall be
A story with our ancestry.

I think what miracle has been
That you whose love among this green
Delightful solitude is still
The stay and substance of my will,
The dear custodian of my song,
My thrifty counsellor and strong,
Should take the time of all time's tide

That was my season, to abide
On earth also ; that we should be
Charted across eternity
To one elect and happy day
Of yellow primroses in May.

The clock is calling five o'clock,
And Nonesopretty brings her flock
To fold, and Tom comes back from town
With hose and ribbons worth a crown,
And duly at The Old King's Head
They gather now to daily bread,
And I no more may meditate
Our brief and variable state.

PENANCES

THESE are my happy penances. To make
Beauty without a covenant ; to take
Measure of time only because I know
That in death's market-place I still shall owe
Service to beauty that shall not be done ;
To know that beauty's doctrine is begun
And makes a close in sacrifice ; to find
In beauty's courts the unappeasable mind.

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